

Ending Family Homelessness

Service Provider Commitment & Strategic Plan 2020



Maricopa County, AZ

2015

Ending Family Homelessness in Maricopa County, AZ by 2020

A Shared Strategic Plan of Homeless Family Service Providers

Ending Family Homelessness: What We Mean

Ending family homelessness means that we have a system of supports that first diverts and prevents homelessness, a rapid response without waiting lists to provide



appropriate shelter to those families that cannot be diverted or prevented from becoming homeless, and a strong focus on quickly returning the family to housing suitable to the unique needs of each family for all families that spend time in shelter. We believe this should be done by building upon the strengths and resiliency of each family, reduce the vulnerabilities and risks that confront the family, and ensures emotional and physical safety.

Our Guiding Principles

We commit to these guiding principles:

- ~ We will be family-centered (person-centered);
- ~ We will make decisions based upon data and evidence, whenever it is available;
- ~ Diversity is a strength, and we will leverage the unique strengths of service providers to achieve our common vision;
- ~ We have a shared responsibility for ending homelessness;
- ~ Services and interventions will be guided by the acuity level of the families.



Our Vision for the Future

We will make decisions and act in the present to support where we want to be by 2020 when family homelessness is ended in Maricopa County, which includes:

- ~ **No families on the street:** all families will have immediate access to shelter when it is appropriate to do so;
- ~ **No service at 100% occupancy:** we will have enough flex within the system to flex based upon demand;



- ~ **A right-sized response:** we will shrink resources that are not required and reallocate those resources to that which is required;
- ~ **Strategic use of financial and community resources:** funding is used less to support what has always been, and instead used to focus on what is right in a way that is less competitive between funders and puts the needs of families first rather than putting the financial interest of the organization providing the services first.

Getting There from Here: The Actions Necessary

In order to achieve our intended state of service in 2020, we commit to the following actions:

- ~ **Strengthening our diversion services and coordinated entry:** we agree to commonly fund and support services to families seeking shelter, with a strong focus on resolving and diverting as many families as possible whenever it is safe and appropriate to do so. Diversion includes looking at the current circumstance of the family - from wherever they are connecting from across the County - and professionally, sensitively, and patiently attempting to solve their housing



instability (or potential housing instability) without ever requiring shelter admission. Data to date shows in-person and phone call volume from across the County (at comparable rates), with the ability to resolve the family's situation between a quarter and a third of the time each week, with less than 10% of families ever returning with a future request for shelter. We will evaluate and improve these diversion services after a minimum of two years of full operations of all providers participating in coordinated entry.

- ~ **Increase exits to permanent housing and the pace with which it happens:** we agree to have a housing focus throughout the entire family shelter system, focusing on the immediacy of having families reintegrate into community and places of their own rather than extensive periods of time in programming or transition. To that end, we shall ensure that there are intentional housing conversations on a frequent basis with each family while they are in the shelter system. We will further ensure that we will work to remove all barriers within our own services that impede the progress of the family in rapidly accessing housing. We agree that transparently sharing the outcomes of each family service provider in this matter would be helpful, presenting the data by the acuity level of the family. We further agree that additional capacity building is required to improve the success of service providers across the sector in more rapidly housing families and helping to ensure that they stay housed.



- ~ **Shrink resources and services where required to increase resources and services elsewhere, while maximizing use of all current resources:** we agree that there may be disconnect in service offerings from service needs given there is demand for shelter and services that are unmet while program beds remain empty, likely as a result of families being ineligible for those services. Either program parameters need to change to increase family access to those services, or those parts of the system need to shrink to reinvest

funding into the parts of the service delivery continuum where there is the greatest demand. There are, undoubtedly, some barriers and opportunities for future consideration in program parameters in the current milieu of services to increase the volume of families moving into housing - whether that be requirements that households have a certain composition, a particular presenting issue, and/or, a qualifying income threshold or economic condition. There will be tough, necessary decisions to better serve the needs of homeless families in the County and meet our objectives by 2020. As we continue to amass data through coordinated entry and overall service use throughout the family shelter and housing system, we should be in a position to better inform changes in 2016 with the first wave of considerable changes in service delivery in 2017.



~ **Ensure decisions are data-driven:** we agree that the collective decisions within and across family shelter providers must be driven by data rather than emotion. We will track, analyze and report on trends in service delivery, and make amendments to programs and funding based upon data. Furthermore, we will ensure that services provided to families will be driven by data and proven evidence-informed practice, in an effort to improve outcomes and meet our collective 2020 goal of ending family homelessness. Through our commitment of using data and evidence, we will be well-positioned to recommend changes to right-sizing and changing interventions in 2016, with the first wave of implementation in 2017.

- ~ **Share a communal pot of money for matters of shared interest:** we agree that there are a number of matters that are of shared interest across all family service providers rather than being solely of interest to one particular service provider. This includes things like coordinated entry, diversion, prevention, birth certificates, training and evaluation. We commit to contribute collectively to a common pot of funding annually to better achieve these shared interests. The determination of the size of the contribution will be informed by the unique financial circumstance of each service provider; however, there shall not be an over-reliance on a small number of service providers in our sector to carry a disproportionate financial load as it relates to our common interests. We will begin our contributions to the communal pot no later than 2016.



- ~ **Educate other systems about family homelessness:** we believe there is a considerable amount of misunderstanding about what the family homeless system does and how it does it, and that this misunderstanding can result in inappropriate referrals, mismatched perceptions, frustration, and poor service for families experiencing homelessness - as well as for other service providers and community entities like the police. We commit to engaging in better education and training of other sectors of service and key community entities to ensure

they have a more informed understanding of what we do and how we do it. The intention is to improve outcomes for families experiencing homelessness that touch other systems and services. We want to work closely with others in the community to ensure the experience of getting appropriate services while homeless and services to get out of homelessness are well understood, appropriately explained, and activated in a way that is aligned with the realities of the family homeless services system (for example, with a current wait list to enter shelter, it is a gross misunderstanding to suggest shelter access will happen immediately for any family).



~ **Advocate with a collective voice:** we agree that if we are to function as a system, our advocacy requires us to stay true to our collective interests and that no single provider should be advocating at the expense of others. Moreover, we believe that there are shared policy and funding interests that are best handled with a unified voice. To get what we need to achieve what we commit to by 2020, we must not be fragmented or self-interested at the expense of the system as a whole.

Additional Considerations: Anticipating What May Go Wrong & Working to Avoid or Minimize those Pitfalls

The best laid plans can be foiled and commitment fall by the wayside when potential dangers that may thwart our efforts are not considered and anticipated, or when we lack the commitment and resolve to work through setbacks. We are concerned that these things may occur and feel it important to name and plan efforts to overcome these pitfalls:



~ **Decisions in the absence of data:** there is no doubt that some decisions get based upon a misunderstanding of trends, a desire to make dramatic change to shake things up, or even emotion. Preliminary data over the past handful of years is currently inclusive, for example, in what would need to be done to “right size” the family system in Maricopa County. We commit to analyzing and making the necessary (and likely painful) changes between now and 2020, but there is no clear indicator from data on what needs to be done currently. The first recommended, collective changes from data will be more apparent in 2016, with the first wave of moves in 2017.

~ **Trust absent or disintegrating:** trust is born from reliability, truth, ability, and strength of others. The absence of any of these erodes trust or does not allow it to be present. While we meet with each other on a regular basis and have some common interests there has been no litmus for trust between family providers currently. Assuming there is trust between providers, change - especially where services and funding are involved - can result in suspicion and the trust that may have been present erodes rapidly. We agree to be authentic and as necessary vulnerable with each other in the process of best serving families in Maricopa County and achieving our goal of ending family homelessness by 2020.



~ **New interventions:** we are collectively well experienced, well researched and well read. We are well travelled. We are engaged with main currents of thought and practice. Nonetheless, who is to say that the magic answer to more rapidly solving family homelessness doesn't come along between now and 2020? As it is appropriate for us to do so, we will learn and apply new methods to service delivery along the way, and focus on incorporating new knowledge and practice without disrupting our shared commitment to ending homelessness.

~ **Family needs pale when compared to other populations:** so much has happened locally to focus on veterans which was welcome. We are cognizant that singles and the campus will continue to be a lightning rod for a collective community response. Should the needs of families be third in the list of priorities? We agree that we cannot let this happen, nor is it appropriate to let this happen. This is not about protecting self-interest and one population group. This is about ensuring policy makers and funders do not leave families behind. It is entirely possible to move on priority setting within all three major population groups (single adults, unaccompanied youth, and families) at the same time. Furthermore, we are sensitive to the experience of other communities where a particular population groups - whether families or others - can be left behind when it seems they are making progress in order to focus on the squeaky wheel. We know this is a collective, long-term commitment. Family homelessness is not a passing fad.

~ **Leadership buy-in:** every organization requires leadership to buy-in, whether that is the CEO or the Board. Any organization going rogue or putting its self interest ahead of the common goal will be disastrous to the goal of ending family homelessness by 2020. We need to stay engaged with leaders within our own organizations and in the community to ensure there is steadfast fixity of purpose in our collective goal of ending family homelessness by 2020.